How to tell your clients if your business is accessible

Janjar Repar

This session introduces key concepts of accessible tourism and the practical ways tourism businesses can communicate their level of accessibility. Drawing on her experience in Slovenia working with both destinations and small tourism providers, Janja explains how accessibility represents not only a matter of inclusion but also a clear business opportunity. Participants will understand how to identify accessibility features, communicate them effectively, and enhance the visitor experience for all travelers.

Introduction

Hello everyone, and thank you for joining.
My name is Janja Repar, and today we will focus on accessibility in tourism — what it truly means, how to identify accessible features in your business, and most importantly, how to communicate them in a way that benefits both your guests and your operations.

Many small tourism businesses are *much more accessible* than they think.
They may have a ramp, a wide door, or a toilet on the ground floor. In many cases, these elements already meet basic legal requirements. Yet, surprisingly, they never communicate this information, even when they have accessible webpages or follow national standards.

This is why awareness and communication are absolutely essential.
Accessibility is not only about compliance or inclusion — it is also about building trust, reaching underserved markets, and improving the overall visitor experience.

Today, I will guide you through how to recognize accessibility, how to describe it clearly for your guests, and how to transform it into a real competitive advantage.

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Objectives

The objectives of this session are to:

- Help tourism SMEs recognize the accessibility features they already have.
- Show how to communicate accessibility information in a practical, accurate, and guest-friendly way.
- Explain why accessibility matters, not only for inclusion but also for business development.
- Share lessons learned from working with people with disabilities, and provide advice on staff training and interaction.
- Offer insights into how to build a more welcoming, respectful, and informed environment for all guests.

Throughout the session, we will explore:

- What accessibility actually looks like in everyday tourism settings.
- Common misconceptions and mistakes made by tourism businesses.
- Simple steps to immediately improve communication and service quality.

Content & Development

When I started working in tourism, I worked at a local tourist board where there was constant activity, many opportunities, and a fast-paced environment.
When I moved into accessible tourism, the contrast was striking — it felt like stepping from a vibrant city into a desert with only a few oasis.
This illustrates how **little visibility** accessibility still has in the sector, and how much room there is for improvement.

Despite this lack of visibility, accessibility is **full of potential**.

One of the most common problems is that businesses often *do not know how to talk about accessibility*.
They fear saying something wrong or assume that accessibility is too complex to explain. As a result, they share nothing at all — and guests with disabilities are left without reliable information.

This is why clear communication is essential.
Guests need to know exactly what to expect:

- Is there a ramp?

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- How wide is the entrance?
- Are there stairs?
- Is the toilet on the ground floor?
- What support can staff provide?

Providing this kind of detail builds trust and makes your business more attractive to new markets.

Another key element is staff training.
Through my work, I made many mistakes at the beginning — for example, when guiding a blind person, I used to grab their hand directly. That is *not* what you should do. There are many nuances to communicating respectfully and offering the right kind of assistance.

One of the most important lessons is this:
Do not feel sorry for people with disabilities.
They are guests like any others. What they need is not compassion, but understanding and respect.

If you speak to a guest in a wheelchair, you should not change your tone of voice, nor speak differently.
It is not about pity — it is about knowing their needs, listening, and providing clear, respectful service.

Accessibility is not a niche topic. It is a growing market, a key part of social inclusion, and an opportunity for tourism businesses to diversify, strengthen their reputation, and welcome a broader range of travelers.

Conclusion

To summarize, here are the main messages from today:

- Tourism SMEs are often more accessible than they realize — but they **fail to communicate it**.
  Clear, honest, and practical information helps guests make informed decisions and builds trust.
  Staff training is essential to ensure respectful communication and proper assistance.
- Accessibility is not only about inclusion — it is also a **valuable business opportunity**.
- With better communication and awareness, destinations can attract new markets and improve visitor satisfaction.

As next steps, I encourage you to:

- Take a fresh look at your business and identify the accessibility features you may already have.

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- Communicate them clearly on your website, social media, and in your booking process.
- Train your staff to interact confidently and respectfully with guests with disabilities.
- Consider accessibility as an ongoing process — every improvement counts.

Thank you very much for your attention.
I hope these insights help you create more welcoming, inclusive, and successful tourism experiences.

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